

**“E. L. GODKIN AT THE BATTLE OF EUPATORIA,
FEBRUARY 17th, 1855.”**
by Dr Douglas J Austin 04 [TWC 23(4) p11 2006]

Edwin Lawrence Godkin (1831-1902) was an Irish-born journal editor and publicist. Among war correspondents, he enjoys the distinction with William Howard Russell and Thomas Chenerly (both of “*The Times*”) of entries in the Encyclopedia Britannica and the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB).

In October 1853, Frederick Knight Hunt, the editor of the London “*Daily News*” sent him as special correspondent to Turkey on the eve of the Crimean War. He joined Omar Pasha's army on the Danube and was later in the Crimea, returning home in September 1855. This experience reportedly gave him a lifelong hatred of war. He later wrote that the war's most important result was ‘the creation and development of the special correspondents of newspapers’ [1, p. 100]. He lectured on the war in Belfast and elsewhere.

His career from 1856 onwards was primarily in the USA, where he founded the important and politically independent “*The Nation*”, a new departure in American journalism. Though its circulation was relatively small, it influenced educated opinion. Its contributors included leading American and British men of letters. He is described in the DNB as “A moralist, concerned for the quality of government in the United States, he wanted rule by the ‘intelligent and virtuous classes’”. Godkin wrote in a clear, humane and sympathetic style. A sample despatch in the “*Daily News*” deserves reproduction both as fine reportage [1, pp. 86- 93] and to show that W H Russell was by no means the only significant war correspondent of the era.

“EUPATORIA, Feb. 17 and 19. (1855)

About half-an-hour before daybreak in the morning I was roused from a sound and comfortable sleep by the clang of arms, the heavy tread of marching men, going at double quick time, words of command yelled rather than shouted; and on listening more attentively, the dull heavy roar of the cannon fell on my ear, as distinctly as the roar of the surge outside would let it, and caused the windows to vibrate faintly at every discharge. I had hardly yet got all my senses into working order when my companion entered my room, booted, spurred, and armed, and announced the advance of the Russians. Upon going out I found the streets crowded with troops, all hurrying to the point of attack - officers tearing at a mad gallop over the frozen mud, the steamers in the harbor getting up their steam with all possible haste, the morning breaking slowly through a thick haze on a cloudy sky, which every few seconds was lighted up by the flash of the rockets, which, in their fiery course through the air, threw a ghastly light upon the upturned faces of the Tartars clustered on the housetops, or standing in groups at the comers of the streets, and watching the progress of the combat in silent expectation.

When I reached the entrenchment a furious cannonade was going on to the right, at an outwork thrown forward a short distance on the plain, and almost surrounded by diminutive windmills; for four or five minutes nothing could be heard but the rapid and tumultuous barking of the field artillery, and then the heavy pieces broke in with a roar which drowned all other sounds, and seemed to rend the clouds, from which the rosy light of the morning now began to stream faintly upon the town and the plain.

The ground surrounding Eupatoria is a vast sandy plain, broken now and then by hillocks and, close to the entrenchments, by two or three small ravines. To the extreme right there is a large salt lake, which completely protects it on that side, and on the left an eminence of no great elevation runs away in a northwesterly direction till lost in the distance. Upon the summit of this were two

large masses of Russian cavalry, lancers and dragoons, drawn up in squares, and further on to the right were huge columns of infantry, some displayed on the slope, but larger numbers still, I suspect, were behind the hill, the glittering of their bayonets when the sun rose being distinctly visible. In front of these, in a long line, were at least seventy guns, about a third of which were pouring a torrent of shot upon the Turkish hornwork and the adjacent portions of the entrenchment in the rear, the fire being vigorously returned, not only from the point of attack, but from all the redoubts on the left and centre of the Turkish lines.

Anything more picturesque than the flash and smoke of the guns, before the day broke clearly, can hardly be imagined; but, when the sun burst through the clouds, and revealed clearly the enormous masses of artillery and infantry that crowned the eminence and lined the slope, I confess - and there were many who partook of my fears - that I could not contemplate the result without considerable apprehension, above all when I remembered that the only means of retreat open, in case of reverse, was the Black Sea, which roared and foamed in our rear with considerable violence.

The cannonade lasted in this way without any striking result on either side till nearly eight o'clock, when the Russians brought down another battery of eight pieces at full gallop, and, taking up a position within eight hundred yards of the homwork (the garrison of which, though the works were still unfinished, had defended itself with unshaken courage), opened a furious enfilading fire. To draw off a portion of this, a redoubt, the position occupied by the regiment of Colonel Ogilby, opened its fire, from one gun, and drew on it instantly a succession of discharges from four pieces out of the eight. Happily, though, in one or two instances, they got the range very fairly, and knocked clay off the top of the rampart in the men's faces, the majority of the shots went very high, and, after whizzing over some tents, fell in amongst some cavalry on the heights in the centre of the position, or dropped right into the sea, without hurting any one. This lasted about an hour, during the whole of which the cannonade continued towards the outwork and on the extreme right with the same violence as ever, and now became mingled with a sharp rattle of musketry, which inspired some apprehension for those parts of the field from this point not visible.

In the early part of the day I had planted myself in the redoubt held by Colonel Ogilby's regiment, but as soon as it opened fire it became untenable for lookers-on, partly on account of the smoke, and the impossibility of remaining upright without making one's person a target for such portions of the Russian artillery as might think it a suitable point of aim. On going higher up along the entrenchment I witnessed some splendid practice from the Valorous steamer in the harbor, which threw shells with great precision across the mounds of sand on the sea-shore, and in amongst the cavalry, on the left, causing them to shift their position several times, till they got fairly out of range. Throughout the Turkish artillery acquitted itself remarkably well; after every shot we could see the enemy's horses rolling over, or flying off riderless, across the field. Their artillery must certainly have suffered severely, as was testified by the number of dead horses and fragments of gun carriages found afterwards.

About ten o'clock a column composed of the Azovski regiment was pushed forward to the assault on the extreme right, where they had less to fear from the fire of the artillery, through a large graveyard filled with memorials of departed worth in the shape of stones of every size and form, from the simple cross or headstone of the peasant to the square and ponderous tomb of some wealthy shopkeeper or director of the quarantine. What induced them to choose such a spot as this for the attack, it is hard to imagine, as the inequalities of the ground must have thrown them more or less into disorder from the first moment.

A few minutes previously the Furious had sent a rocket party ashore, who landed on the extreme right of the town, and coming round amongst the windmills, opened their fire on the Russians just as the head of the column issued from the burying-ground and appeared on the glacis,

and at the same moment the musketry commenced from the entrenchment. The column pushed on to a distance of not more than twenty yards from the ditch, but there gave way and fell into disorder. Selim Pacha now made a sortie with a brigade of Egyptians, and charged them with the bayonet; but, in the act of leading his men on, received a musket ball through the body, and fell dead. Ismail Bey was also wounded on the same occasion.



Battle of Eupatoria showing the death of Selim Pasha from Tyrell

The Russians now fell into disorder, gave way, and retired, leaving the graveyard strewn with their dead. The artillery limbered up, and went off, firing occasional shots till it passed the brow of the hill. The cavalry preceded it at a canter, but when on the other side the whole retreated in the most beautiful order, to a distance of about two miles, where they bivouacked on the plain.

Immediately after the cessation of the firing, I walked down to the crownwork, and at every yard along the inside of the inner entrenchment found traces of the conflict in the shape of battered houses, dead horses, and here and there wounded or dead men. These were, however, the natural consequences of four hours' fierce cannonading, and I passed them without bestowing much attention upon them, till I was stopped in a narrow passage between the parapet and a ruined wall by two soldiers marching abreast, with a very excited triumphant air, and each carrying in his hand what at first I took to be a pig's head, but which on nearer approach I found, to my infinite disgust, to be the heads of two unfortunate Russians who had fallen in the graveyard; one, from the long hair, evidently that of a Greek volunteer; the other the closely cropped skull of a soldier of the line - both gory and disfigured, and leaving bloody traces on the ground over which they passed. I had scarce recovered from my surprise and horror, when I met two other savages bearing aloft on the points of their bayonets two other trophies of a similar nature. They had hardly passed me, however, when they were stopped by the news that their two confreres who had preceded them on laying their hideous spolia at the feet of Omer Pacha, instead, as they expected, of being patted on the back, and receiving a good backsheesh, were instantly arrested, and marched off to prison. The two last instantly lost their enthusiasm, drooped their bayonets, and went back, with a very downcast air, all the way looking as if they wished to rid themselves of their burden without exhibiting their fears or their weakness to their comrades.

The scene in the interior of the outwork was terrific. Men lay on every side gashed and tom by those frightful wounds which round-shot invariably inflict. Here a gory trunk, looking as if the head had been wrenched from the shoulders by the hand of a giant; there an artilleryman, lying across a splinter of his own gun-carriage - the splintered bones of his thighs protruding from the flesh; another cut in two as if by a knife, and his body doubled up like a strip of brown paper. The artillery horses and their drivers were stationed amongst the windmills which stand in thick clusters between

the outwork and the fortifications of the interior, and, as the whole of this space was swept for nearly two hours by the fire of the battery which was last brought up, the havoc was dreadful. Nearly eighty artillery horses were killed on a small patch of ground, some by the shot, others by the splinters of wood and stone, which flew in showers from the mills at every discharge, and the soil was strewn with their blood and entrails. I saw all the horses of one gun knocked together into one indiscriminate mass, as if some mighty force had squeezed them up like so much butter.

The mills presented a most ludicrous spectacle; some had one arm left; others, two; and some were tumbled into a mass of ruins, from which a wheel or a wing struck up in the air as if protesting against the outrage. None of all these things, however, attracted much attention from the defenders of the position. All were talking loudly, some few laughing; artillerymen, taking the harness off the dead horses, and making repairs on the damaged guns; some throwing up fresh clay where the works had suffered; others carrying off the wounded in blankets, many of the latter groaning loudly; others reverently covering the faces of the dead with the skirts of their coats, and all this amidst a hum and buzz of voices which rose as merrily and cheerfully upon the morning air, towards the sunny sky, as if it were the close of a fete, and no grim evidences of a bloody struggle lay on every yard of the soil.

Omer Pacha rode round soon after, with a large staff and most of the European officers who were in the place, and in his train. I went down to the graveyard. The firing had certainly not ceased twenty minutes, and yet at least 2,000 Tartars had rushed out of the town, and stripped and plundered the dead Russians. When Omer Pacha reached the spot, he drove them all away, but not before every one of the bodies was stark naked. The greater number seemed very young men, some mere boys; all wore an expression of perfect repose; no straining or distortion was visible either in the features or the limbs; they lay like men who were weary and slept. Many were half buried and crushed under the tombstones, which the round-shot and the rockets had hurled from their places, and sent flying in pieces in all directions. Many of the Russians had still a shred of a shirt or an old pair of drawers clinging to their mangled remains, and it would have required no great stretch of imagination to have supposed them the peaceable tenants of the tombs around, who had risen to ask the cause of the wild tumult which raged above their abodes."

[1] "Life and Letters of Edwin Lawrence Godkin (Vol. 1 pp. 86-93), ed. Rollo Ogden; Reprinted by Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1972.